



Statement of
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Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development
“Promoting Broader Access to Public Transportation for America’s Older
Adults and People with Disabilities”

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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member DeMint and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on priorities for transit in the reauthorization of the surface transportation program on behalf of Transportation for America. Transportation for America is the largest, most diverse coalition in the country working to improve our nation's outdated transportation policies so that they work for everyone. Our member groups represent ordinary Americans from all walks of life who rely on our transportation infrastructure to be safe, affordable and convenient.

Before taking my current role, I worked at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission in the San Francisco Bay Area of California, where I oversaw the development of the region's Coordinated Human Services Public Transportation Plan and guided the investment of a variety of federal transportation funds.

Aging in Place, Stuck without Options: Seniors and Transit

While many of Transportation for America's transit priorities relate to the federal transit program as a whole, I want to begin by focusing on the needs of America's older adults. My statement is drawn primarily from research conducted by Transportation for America and our partner organizations. That research was the basis for our recent report, "Aging in Place, Stuck without Options," which called attention to the shrinking mobility options for our nation's growing senior population.

As the Subcommittee is undoubtedly aware, the baby boom generation is our nation's largest ever and has the longest life expectancy of any previous generation. Its members are now beginning to reach retirement age, and will do so until 2030. Many will live years beyond their ability to safely operate a vehicle for everything they do. However, our researchers found that by

2015, four in five Americans 65 and older will live in communities where driving is the only viable travel option, because public transportation services are poor or non-existent.

Where Seniors Live Today

The baby boom generation -- more than 77 million people born between 1946 and 1964¹ – came of age during the unprecedented economic expansion that followed World War II, which helped fuel the rise of new suburban communities built around the automobile. Suburban expansion was supported in large part by the largest infrastructure project in U.S. history, the construction of the Interstate Highway system and its urban segments. In this period we began to build an entirely new form of human habitat, communities built on the premise that every adult resident would be able to own and operate a vehicle and use it for every trip from home, for all time.

Having grown up and raised their own children in these communities, baby boomers will likely stay where they currently reside. Demographic research shows that after age 55, only a small share of Americans change residences voluntarily. Surveys by AARP and others find that the vast majority of people age 50-plus want to stay in their homes for as long as possible, and when they do move, they most often want to stay in their communities and near existing support networks. Today, 79 percent of seniors live in suburban, exurban and rural areas.²

Seniors' Use of Transit

Despite inadequate service in many communities, older Americans are taking more trips on transit and choosing public transportation for a larger share of their overall mobility needs. Data from the most recent National Household Travel Survey shows that seniors took more than a

¹ Coughlin, Joseph F. (2009) "Longevity, Lifestyle, and Anticipating the New Demands of Aging on the Transportation System" Public Works Management & Policy Volume 13 Number 4 301-311

² Rosenbloom, Sandra (2003) "The Mobility Needs of Older Americans: Implications for Transportation Reauthorization" Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C.

billion trips on transit in 2009, which is a 51 percent increase from 2001.³ Given the volatile gas prices and shaky retirement portfolios of recent years, those numbers likely would be higher still if better service were available in more places. Even in areas with transit service, older Americans must overcome barriers to transit use that could be fixed with a relatively modest investment: lack of sidewalks, appropriately timed crossing signals and other pedestrian safety measures and a dearth of bus-stop benches or shelters that offer protection from sun, heat, and rain.

Public transportation offers an affordable alternative to driving. For seniors living on a fixed income, public transit offers a way to connect with health care providers, friends and the larger community without breaking the bank covering the costs of fuel, insurance and monthly car payments. AAA estimates that the average car owner who drives 15,000 miles a years will spend \$8,700 in 2011.⁴

Public transportation also provides a critical lifeline to older adults when they are no longer able to drive. A 2002 study in the American Journal of Public Health found that women in their early 70s who stop driving live on for an average of ten years, and men of the same age group live another six years, on average.⁵ These are years when many will need access to transportation options. Without access to affordable travel options, seniors age 65 and older who no longer drive make 15 percent fewer trips to the doctor, 59 percent fewer trips to shop or eat out and 65 percent fewer trips to visit friends and family, compared to drivers of the same age, research by

3 Lynott, Jana and Carlos Figueiredo (2011) "How the Travel Patters of Older Adults Are Changing: Highlights from the 2009 National Household Travel Survey" AARP Public Policy Institute, Washington, D.C.

4 AAA (2011) "Your Driving Costs 2011" Available at www.aaaexchange.com/Assets/Files/201145734460.DrivingCosts2011.pdf

5 Foley, Daniel, Heimovitz, Harley, Guralnik, Jack and Dwight Brock "Driving Life Expectancy of Persons Aged 70 Years and Older in the United States" American Journal of Public Health, August 2002, Vol 92, No. 8.

the Surface Transportation Policy Project shows.⁶

What the Future Holds

Research we commissioned from the Center for Neighborhood Technology evaluated 241 metropolitan areas – those for which complete data were available – and found that in 2000, more than 11.5 million seniors lived in areas with poor transit access. By 2015, if seniors follow through on their plans to age in place, this will increase to more than 15.5 million - a 35 percent jump.

A 2008 survey by AARP found that 85 percent of older Americans were either extremely concerned or very concerned about rising fuel prices, leading many to look toward other forms of transportation or to reduce their travel.⁷ These seniors, and millions more, will need access to affordable public transportation and other alternatives to driving if they are to remain active and independent.

The percentage of seniors in metropolitan areas with poor access to transit in 2015 varies significantly. For instance, 90 percent of older residents in Atlanta will have poor access to transit, while only 12 percent of seniors in the San Francisco area will have poor access in 2015.

What Can Be Done

There are as many ways to address the mobility needs of an aging population as there are communities. Some inner suburbs might decide to extend an existing transit system from the urban core into their area. Some outer suburbs and more rural areas might create a call center for dial-a-ride or ride-sharing services. Some communities with an existing public transportation network might encourage senior-friendly housing in walkable neighborhoods near transit stops.

⁶ Bailey, Linda (2004), “Aging Americans: Stranded without Options” Surface Transportation Policy Project, Washington, D.C.

⁷ Skufca, Laura. (2008), “Is the Cost of Gas Causing Americans to Use Alternative Transportation?” AARP, Washington, D.C.

Just as they could not have built the Interstates without federal involvement, these communities will not be able to address their burgeoning mobility challenges without the support that only Congress can offer. It is critical to note, as well, that addressing the needs of older adults through increased transportation options will result in greater opportunity and access for all Americans. Demand for public transportation in the United States has never been greater, with ridership at its highest levels in 50 years and more than 600 new rail, streetcar and bus rapid transit projects proposed throughout the nation. In 2009, Americans took a total of 10.4 billion trips on public transportation, covering more than 55 billion passenger miles.

New riders have come from a variety of sources. Volatile gas prices have driven many car commuters to switch to transit, while some riders have been lured by the provision of new services – commuter trains and buses, new light rail lines, vanpools and even the return of streetcars in several cities. Homes and jobs have located around new and existing lines, making it more convenient and easy to ride transit. Others are looking for ways to save money on car ownership or seek a more reliable commute, to act on their environmental values and to relax or be productive during their commutes.

A number of riders use transit because the alternative is to be stranded. These are older Americans whose physical limitations or budgets no longer permit them to drive. They are young adolescents getting to school. And they are low-income families, disproportionately African-American and Hispanic, who cannot afford to own and operate one or more cars. Ensuring mobility for these Americans is important to all of us. Among our nation's core values is the promise that everyone should have access to opportunity and jobs, to be able to support themselves and be contributing members of the community. We believe all Americans, including

older adults and those with disabilities, should be able to live full and productive lives whether or not they are able or can afford to drive a car.

Why We Should Make the Investment Now

Public transportation costs money - but it can ultimately save households and businesses thousands of dollars a year. It can also generate profits, jobs, enhanced land values, tax revenue, new development and redevelopment. This helps improve economic competitiveness while reducing congestion and environmental impacts.

- Positions in transit operations and maintenance are blue-collar, green jobs that cannot be outsourced. So, too, are construction jobs generated by building new transit lines and stations, vehicles, and maintenance facilities. Every \$1 billion of transit investment creates or supports 36,000 jobs. Transit agencies employed 390,000 Americans in 2006, a population greater than that of St. Louis, Pittsburgh or Tampa.⁸
- The American Public Transportation Association reports that on average, every \$1 invested in public transportation generates almost \$4 in economic benefits. In addition, a \$1 billion investment in public transportation results in \$3.6 billion in business sales and generates nearly \$500 million in federal, state and local tax revenues.
- According to a recent Reconnecting America study, demand for living near transit in walkable, mixed-use communities is projected to double over the next 20 years.
- The Texas Transportation Institute found that without public transportation service, the nation's drivers would have suffered an additional 785 million hours of delay and consumed an additional 640 million gallons of fuel in 2010. Absent public transportation

⁸ APTA "2011 Public Transportation Fact Book," Available at http://www.apta.com/gap/policyresearch/Documents/APTA_2009_Fact_Book.pdf

in the 439 areas studied, congestion costs for 2009 would have increased by nearly \$19 billion, from \$115 billion to \$134 billion.

- American households can save close to \$8,700 per year on average, or \$724 per month, when they use public transportation rather than a car, according to a 2009 estimate by the American Public Transportation Association.⁹ The Center for Neighborhood Technology, meanwhile, has found that families living in areas where public transit is available spend about half as much on transportation as families in locations without transit.

The savings made possible by transit are also especially important to Americans in low-income households, many of whom are forced to drive by a lack of transit options. As of 2005, 73 percent of households below the federal poverty line had a car, and on average, working families making between \$20,000 and \$50,000 spend close to 30 percent of their household incomes on transportation - more than they spend on housing.

As our population and energy use grow, increased use of public transportation is the most effective strategy for achieving significant energy savings and environmental gains – without new taxes, government mandates or regulations. Emissions from road vehicles are the largest contributors to smog; currently, over 200 million passenger cars and light trucks account for about 50 percent of air pollution nationwide. Even at current levels of use, public transportation saves the U.S. the equivalent of 4.2 billion gallons of gas annually, reducing the nation's dependence on imported foreign oil. Public transportation also reduces carbon dioxide emissions by 37 million metric tons annually.

What Congress Can Do

⁹ American Public Transportation Association, "More Than \$8,600 Saved Annually by Individuals Who Seek to 'Ride Out' the Rough Economy by Riding Public Transportation," News Release, May 6, 2009.



Communities around the country are working hard to plan ways to solve their residents' mobility needs: A recent analysis by Reconnecting America found more than 640 major transit projects being planned around the country. Unfortunately, current funding levels are drastically below the amount required to meet this demand.

We recognize that the Congress is grappling with numerous challenges related to our nation's fiscal situation. However, continued underinvestment in public transportation will only exacerbate the situation by limiting our future growth potential.

The next surface transportation authorization should increase dedicated funding for a variety of forms of public transportation such as buses, trains, vanpools, specialized transit and ridesharing – including support for operations and maintenance for services essential to seniors in both urban and rural areas. A recent study by the Federal Transit Administration found a backlog of \$78 billion in maintenance needs at our nation's bus and rail systems, plus \$14 billion in annual maintenance needs going forward. Without additional funds, these needs will go unmet.

Congress must provide funding and incentives for transit operators, nonprofit organizations, and local communities to engage in innovative best practices such as mobility management, programmatic coordination, public-private partnerships, and the widespread deployment of technologies such as intelligent transportation systems. Mobility management can help make the best use of limited resources. According to United We Ride – a federal interagency initiative - “mobility managers serve as policy coordinators, operations service brokers and customer travel negotiations” – providing a single, user friendly source of personalized information helping people understand how to use transit services. This is accomplished through computer-dialed dispatch, automatic vehicle locations, and rerouting of vehicles to meet passenger needs. Ride Connection, a non-profit community organization, worked with TriMet – Portland's major transit



agency – to reduce its paratransit costs by almost \$2 million. In addition, service coordination is critical to meeting the needs of seniors. The LINX cooperative incorporated in January 2010 by the Yellowstone Business Partnership is an example of coordination to be emulated across the country. The LINX program has integrated transportation providers in 27 counties across three states by providing an easy-to-use and more seamless network

Congress must also encourage state departments of transportation, metropolitan planning organizations, and transit operators to involve seniors and other community stakeholders in developing plans for meeting the mobility needs of older adults.

Congress must ensure that state departments of transportation retain their current authority under federal law to “flex” a portion of their highway funds for transit projects and programs. This flexibility is essential for states to respond to their unique transportation needs and avoids locking them into “one-size-fits-all” expenditure requirements.

Finally, the reauthorization should include a “complete streets” policy to ensure that streets and intersections around transit stops are safe and inviting for people of all ages and abilities. A “complete streets” policy would make certain that transportation planners and engineers design and operate the entire roadway with all users in mind.

The future transportation needs of America’s seniors – and indeed, of all Americans are great.

The federal government should play a role in providing a viable solution to this problem by providing greater flexibility, fairness, and funding in the next six-year transportation law.

Increased federal support for transit and the flexibility to use transit resources more efficiently is critical if we are to realize the mobility, economic, health and environmental benefits that transit provides. It is our hope that this testimony will help serve as a catalyst for building a system that realizes the myriad benefits outlined above and creates a robust, resilient transportation network



that works for all Americans.

We thank the Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the Subcommittee for working on this issue of critical importance for the nation and stand ready to continue to assist the Subcommittee in its work as it moves forward.